Disturbing the AcademicConferenceMachine: Post-qualitative re-turnings

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Title: **Disturbing the AcademicConferenceMachine: Post-Qualitative Re-turnings**

Abstract

Author 1: They say they want to disturb the AcademicConferenceMachine.

Author 34: What is an AcademicConferenceMachine?

Author 2: Please do not go in that direction. Ask, for example, what does an AcademicConferenceMachine do?

Author 51: Ok, so what does it do?

Author 6: AcademicConferenceMachines are becoming so regulated and standardized that they might lose the possibility to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently.

Author 227: Do you think they succeeded?

Author 9999: I do not know.

Disturbing Introduction 1: re/sta(r)ting

Reviewer J: I like this article, it is unconventional, it challenges me, which is great, and to be honest that doesn't often happen when you know this field as well as I do. But, oh dear me, it is a difficult read and I wonder what readers will make of it. I am even a little hesitant if I should be writing a review.

Editor: I have read the reviews and feel torn. The reviewers are my trusty gatekeepers and thus I must take their views into account and I can see they have some reservations about this paper but at the same time I want to introduce novelty and creativity into an established field – and this paper not only challenges methodological and theoretical taken-for-granteds but is also having a go at introducing new language and writing formats.

Reviewer P: Style, content and form are inter-related and while I accept the authors are trying to do something different in their thinking and writing about the academic-conference-machine, they really do need to provide some more details on what their purpose and recognizable intentions are. The writing is also a problem – many dense ideas, too dense, needs unpacking. What should I ask them to do without defaulting into simplicity and 'dumbing' down?

Reviewer J: I'll refer them to some readings – that should help them situate the paper better … although I'm not actually sure … do they need to do this? Why would be it be important or even helpful to use existing concepts and notions which are the very things they are working against. At the same time it may help them clarify their points. Or am I asking them to subjugate their thinking to normative knowledges? Academic-conference-machine produces governed scholarly bodies and texts which these authors are actually trying to resist.

A FEW MONTHS LATER…

Author C: So, now we have written a new introduction which does what we were asked to do by the reviewers. That is, we have included a frame for reading the article in that we give the reader some 'up-front' handholds to help then orientate themselves to the disturbances that unfold during the article. We want to be responsive to the reviewers' concerns since we do want to share our work with others.

Author B: Yes, the earthworm and the cyborg as two conceptual tools are good in that respect.

Author E: I'm feeling uncomfortable. I'm feeling as if I'm being squeezed back into a humanist coat which we are trying to shrug off. Are they asking us to be more conventional, to

explain the un-explainable? Do they want us to write a more traditional paper with acceptable style, theories, and vocabulary?

Author B: For me it's about going back into the known and to do the very things we are trying to write against in our paper … do they want to normalize us?

Author A: Hang on a bit, I'm not sure if it is too bad to be a little more humanist at the start of the article, to explain what we're doing …

Author D: I agree. Some readers might be unfamiliar with post-qual research, and we have to take that on board. It is also possible that the reviewers want our text to be clear, understandable, and familiar. However, why can't we enjoy 'difficult and troubling' texts? Are we afraid of the strange, unknown, and other? Why can't we admit these troublings into the academy?

Author C: Okay, how about we think of it like this? The Disturbing Introduction is a compromise for us but possibly a necessity for some readers – can't we live with that? After situating the readers into the problematics and conceptual landscape of the academic-conference-machine we live and explore the un-regular and becoming conference spaces in more fluid ways in the rest of the paper.

Disturbing Introduction 2: Re/orientatating

This paper ponders the nature of the AcademicConferenceMachine and how its striated spaces and regulatory intellectual organisation might be disturbed. It suggests that academic conferences produce themselves as spaces of intellectual capitalism within the global economy of neoliberal universities (see, Gill and Donaghue, 2016; Lorenz, 2012). The global reshaping of academic systems over the last twenty years, in response to marketisation, privatisation and financialisation of universities, has transformed 'the organisation of work, of education and research as intellectual labour [and] reconfigured the place of the scholar as well as the student' (Parker, 2016, p. 551). As such the conference space, as part of the neoliberal academic complex, has the potential to be framed as an AcademicConferenceMachine – an all too predictable organisation of abstract after abstract, presentation after presentation, paper after paper, old/known/familiar knowledge being replaced by another set of old/known/familiar. Although cognisant of the heterogenous nature of academic conferences (Humphries and Learmonth, 2009), and that the academic conference is a little studied space and place of academic labour (Henderson, 2015), this paper takes as axiomatic the overarching thesis that academic conferences shape, regulate, normativise and control accepted and expected behaviour and identities (Bell and King, 2010). In particular, Ford and Harding (2008,

246) contend that conferences can be places of control in which academics are subject to 'processes of domination … achieved through infantilization, fear, disparagement and seduction'. We propose that the AcademicConferenceMachine can be seen and sensed as a reliable, regulatory, structured organisational space, a space of (non)repetition – which runs the risk of becoming so regulating, normalising and standardizing that it might lose the possibility to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997).

This paper forms a productive (un)critique of the AcademicConferenceMachine which interrogates the 'normal' and 'natural' space of an academic conference. The 'disturbances' that prompts this paper took place at the 9th Biennial Conference on *Gender, Work and Organization* (GWO) at Keele University, UK, in June 2016. The stream *('anonymised')* organized by Author 5 focused around a series of playful experiments which introduced practices of post-qualitative research creating disturbances into the regulated space of the GWO conference. The emergence of post-qualitative inquiry has been used as a means to unsettle and deconstruct traditional qualitative research practices (Lather and St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011) and to move beyond a representational anthropocentric worldview. However, this paper does not attempt merely to give a simple and 'straight' account of what took place (as if that were possible anyway) but, rather, to use those experimental disturbances to create post-qualitative possibilities both for writing an academic paper differently and for interrogating the AcademicConferenceMachine as a space which, in its current format and approach, tends towards practices that discipline and police bodies, objects and ways of knowing-doing. Post-qualitative possibilities are, therefore, employed in this paper to hold to account both the exploration of the AcademicConferenceMachine and the means by which we have entangled with writing, with the past/present/further experiences of and through the disturbances of the particular conference events. In doing so, we sight/site/cite the AcademicConferenceMachine with the acadademicwritingmachine (Henderson, Honan, and Loch, 2016) as inter-related cogs in the machine of academic production. In accordance with our post-qualitative impulses, we set out with rhizomatic aim(s) that spread in unpredictable ways as they become. Such impulses refuse to predict that which they purport to direct or make claims for in terms of their eventual achievement.

We look to Wyatt and Gale, in their explorations on 'writing to it', who argue for writing to understand, writing for world-making, as that which 'does not necessarily clarify but leads us into darkness, into … fog(s) of uncertainty, blurring our senses' (2017, p. 8). However, aligned with Pullen and Rhodes (2008) in their exploration and practicings of 'dirty writing', the current writing production takes seriously Lather's caution that 'textual experiments are not so much about solving the crisis of representation as about troubling the very claims to represent' (2001, p. 201) whilst

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recognising the imperative to refuse paralysis by simultaneously 'doing it' and 'troubling it' (*ibid*, p. 204). In a parallel move, the current paper explores and is entangled with Barthes' (1990) call for a shift from readerly to writerly texts – exemplified recently by Author7 attempts to 'write visually'. We deploy these and other invocations as a means to become (un)knowing and hence to attempt writing differently – both in an effort to keep alive and open the vitality of those events at the GWO conference that re-turn here, and as a strategy of disruption.

The paper employs two particular conceptual tools – the earthworm and the cyborg – as writing disturbance mechanisms as we experiment with re-turning the GWO events at the AcademicConferenceMachine. Both earthworms and cyborgs are agitators and disrupters of traditional ways of thinking and seeing the world. The earthworm figuration acts as a decomposer of the familiar, it reveals sites of re-turning (Barad, 2014) which is more than a reflective reviewing of life and events. Re-turning is dynamic and generative, invigorating past/present/future connections and dissolving the Cartesian boundaries on nature/culture to generate new knowledge practices (Ripamonti et al., 2015). In addition, the cyborg metaphor (Haraway, 1991), with its origins in challenging the nature/culture binary, helps re-view phallocentric hegemony and posit a new feminist position as a hybrid chimera which moves beyond traditional notions of the feminine body. Both these conceptual tools perform similar functions as they disturb binaries present in the practicings of academic life. However they are put to work in this paper, not to produce a smoothness but to jar, disturb and blur the un-sense of writing the AcademicConferenceMachine (Gale and Wyatt, 2017). These writings attempt to hold to Lather's impulse 'toward innovations leading to new forms, toward negotiation with enabling violence attentive to frame narratives that works against the terrain of controllable knowledge' (2001, p. 221). In this paper then, earthworms and cyborg writing become ethical and political engagements with both the AcademicConferenceMachine and the experiments which provoke, re-turn and disturb these experiments.

We are hopeful that working with these two independent but related and epistemologically relational concepts will help us disturb – to tunnel, aerate, disrupt, turn and re-turn – the familiarity of both the AcademicConferenceMachine and the academicwritingmachine, in ways which offer fragmentary glimpses into and disturbances and re-turning (to/of) conference events and of the production of this paper. This paper's production, then, is generative of new imaginings, rather than a reproduction or record of the AcademicConferenceMachine disturbances we engaged in. In what follows, the reader will be presented with a series of vignettes, each with its own rhythm, length and intensity. The uneven fragmentary nature of the vignettes, as a form of writing differently, is inspired by precedents that inf(l)ect our current productions (c.f. Guttorm et al., 2016; Pullen and

Rhodes, 2008). The non-linearity and heterogeneity of the vignettes is intentionally jarring and acts to move away from what might more usually, be expected of academic papers anchored and fixed in a representationalist logic (MacLure, 2013). In addition, the rhizomatic nature of the vignettes is our response to Phillips, Pullin and Rhodes call for writing which 'disturb[s] the taken-for-granted [gender] neutrality of the ways that organization studies is written' (2014, p. 327). Thus, our project aims to set out the possibilities for a polysexual writing which 'challenges hegemonic masculine orthodoxy by confusing it rather than attempting to replace it with another (feminine) orthodoxy' (*ibid*, p. 314).

Prelude/Dawn/Inspiration

May 2016

Three people (people? or phenomena?) are sitting (or intra-acting in, through and around) on a bench in the campus. All around them, the 12th *International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry* (ICQI) is taking place. They are wondering how to organize a stream the following month. Maggie MacLure's (2016) presentation at ICQI offers them inspiration. During her presentation, she showed a coloured slide of a stuffed cat, which had appeared one day in the corridor of her university department in Manchester. The cat is curled up on a rug. After the cat, other animals and objects began to appear on the rug: two stuffed birds and a blue bowl with white paper inside that made it look like milk. Nobody knows who brought those objects. MacLure describes those things as 'provocative events' which generated interesting conversations among the members of the department; they succeeded in disrupting the usual banality of organisational life.

The people-phenomena on the bench begin to wonder how the banality/regularity/discipline of a conference on gender, work and organisation might be disrupted/questioned? How might some importance be attributed to 'the plain, seemingly unproblematic 'presence' of dumb matter' (Massumi, 2002, p. 1)? How might the unexpected appearance of some objects unsettle a neoliberal conference space? How might working-with-objects enact a shift toward 'posthuman subjectivity [and] reshape … humanistic practices, by stressing heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality, instead of autonomy and self-referential disciplinary purity' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 145)? And how could we, as post-qualitative earthworms engaged in acts of becoming-with, write about re-turning the soil of the GWO conference as a means of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016)?

Doing the concept of AcademicConferenceMachine

The academic conference – streams and themes; papers, presentations and symposia; network meetings, business meetings, planning meetings; the 'main' conference and the attached emerging researchers 'mini' conference; coffee-time conversations. These conference activities are often accompanied by publishers' book stands, posters, publicity flyers, conference brochures and proceedings, apps, goodie-bags, mugs, t-shirts and freebies (pens, CDs, coasters, sweets), later journal articles and special issues which become the familiar conference objects. Taken together, this mode of organisation and these objects and outputs form the known and recognised material-discursive architecture of the academic conference. This architecture produces highly striated conference spaces oriented to the production of knowledge as neoliberal intellectual capital (Olssen and Peters, 2005). In such spaces, knowledge innovation (after all, conferences are spaces to present 'new' research aren't they?) is both entangled with and enmeshed in familiar academic performatives which regulate and discipline bodies via pre-existing knowledge 'boxes' (for example, conference streams and themes).

Neoliberal conferences constitute a material-discursive space of recognition for academics. They have what Butler (1997, p. 33) called 'inaugurative' power in conferring status, acceptance and belonging for academics at all stages of their careers. The neoliberal conference space enables scholars and attendees to be counted and legitimated as scholars (Henderson, Honan and Loch, 2016). More broadly, it functions organisationally to demonstrate individual responsibility and capital efficiency (Parker, 2016) in the contemporary competitive global knowledge economy in which universities have become Research & Development structures which transfer knowledge obtained through public funds to private organisations (Shore, 2010). The neoliberal AcademicConferenceMachine incorporates intellectual capital into a global labour market that demands flexibility, entrepreneurship, self-responsibility, and adaptability (Fitzsimons, 2004). Many studies document how academic capitalism in higher education harness the practices and politics of managerial control as a means of disciplining academic works (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Author6; Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012).

Re-turning the GWO Conference

So, in order to … illuminate the possibilities both for writing an academic paper differently, and for interrogating, resisting, and disrupting a neoliberal conference space and its disciplining and policing format and approach, we think of ourselves as becoming-earthworms, as engaging in 're-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or … turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it,

burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it' (Barad, 2014, p. 168). What follows, then, is a series of experiments which blend and re-blend, dig and re-dig what occurred (and is occurring also now while somebody is reading these pages) during those days spent at Keele University. We turn, re-turn, create tunnels, and aerate.

Tunnelling through cyborg writing

In *A Cyborg Manifesto* Donna Haraway (1991) proposed the cyborg as a means to dissolve and break apart the notion of the gendered subject – the cyborg became/is a chimera, a hybrid between machine and organisms. The cyborg is a subversive figuration for the problematization of hegemonic gender-positioning and heralds a post-gender world. Haraway's cyborg suggests that wider potentialities are revealed as the gendered subject is dissolved as the cyborg is committed to 'partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity' (*ibid*, p. 151) allowing for a life always partial, never finalised. Corporeal and more than corporeal bodies become permeable, boundaries are dissolved and imperceptible, and it becomes a challenge to see where one body stops and another begins. Cyborg politics are full of 'noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine' (*ibid*, p. 176). They are loud, messy, mythical, regenerative, creative, potentiality. We take up cyborg figurations and see what they offer us in our entanglement with the AcademicConferenceMachine. As we seek to think differently about conferencing and writing and collaboration Haraway's (*ibid*, p. 154) words ring in our ears: 'My cyborg myth is about transgressive boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.' But how might the cyborg help us write the GWO events? At a perhaps most obvious level, our (re)membered conversations/confabulations have been extended via our technological linkages (Skype, One Drive, e-mail, iphone) which constitute us all as cyborg human/technology fusions. More than that, cyborg writing, in post-qualitative frame, means we cannot simply 'write up' the GWO events. Doing cyborg writing is an earthworm experiment to produce something from the tentacular connections we have made (Haraway, 2016). Cyborgs (and earthworms) undo usual modes of representation. Who has written this paper? 'We' 'all' have. Perhaps, then, our cyborg writing is a form of *écriture feminine*, Hélène Cixous' (1976) phrase for writing which challenges the gender(ed) binaries of writing without reifying one binary over another? Where does 'my' writing begin and another author's end? 'We' 'all' deposited writing treasures in a collaborative chest; we all took from that what each wanted; we shared drafts; we over-wrote each others' drafts; we tracked-changes, deleted and added, so that now 'I' (whoever 'I' am) have no idea which words 'belong' to 'me' and which don't – apart from the fact that 'I'

(that is, one of us at this moment, does it matter who?) is typing these words onto the page. This is not quite post-authorship (Author1) but it is getting closer to it.

We wonder what this cyborg writing, in which we re-turn our GWO experiments, will bring us. Will it be the creative post-qualitative experimentation we seek or will we become part of the academicwritingmachine (Henderson, Honan and Loch, 2016)? Will our cyborg writing be too transgressive for the requirements of academic publishing (Muhr and Rehn, 2015)? However, we also note that 'writing is pre-eminently the technology of the cyborg's etched surfaces of the late twentieth century' (Haraway, 1991, p. 176). If this is so then maybe, as Prasad (2016) acknowledges, our cyborg writing might offer a provocation; it might also, as St. Pierre (1997) suggests we need to, unsettle modes of writing and publishing normalcy. Alternatively, its creative disturbances may go unheard. Maybe you will let us know.

Aerating objects in organisation studies

Objects play a relevant role in the field of organisation studies. Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz (2004) note that in organisations objects have at least three functions: instrumentals, symbolic, and aesthetic. Indeed, the last thirty years of objects-related organisational research has provided evidence of how sensory aspects of organisations, such as artefacts, are imbued with social meaning and symbolism (Gagliardi, 1996; Strati, 1999). This approach asserts that artefacts pin down meanings, contain their fluctuation and transfer cultural meanings to succeeding generations through both their formal and sensorial qualities. Objects have been analysed as a sign and symbol of personal potentially resisting bureaucratic order (Ng and Höpfl, 2011) and organisational identity (Shortt, Betts and Warren, 2013) in relation to their display or hiddenness in the workplace.

The people-phenomena are sitting around a table with other participants. They are playing with a whole series of objects: ↔ some babies' dummies/pacifiers ↔ a corkscrew (in the shape of a dildo) ↔ two plastic frogs ↔ a Billy doll ↔ a mask ↔ a furry tail ↔ a toy gorilla ↔ a lizard ↔ a kangaroo cock (or napkin) ring ↔ some cock-shaped straws ↔ Fragments of male dolls ↔ and ↔ and ↔ and ↔ (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Objects at the GWO conference space

In the days that followed, those objects took on a life of their own and began to enliven the neoliberal conference space. They contributed to a process of atmospheric building. Some objects started to move around, to change position. Some of them became 'travelling objects' spread

around the conference rooms, appearing in the bathrooms, in the dining-hall, in the corridors and at the entrance. Some never returned from their travels (for example, the dildo-shaped corkscrew and all the cock-shaped straws) while others came back (for example, the gorilla and the kangaroo cock-ring). Were the corkscrew and straws stolen? Are they still there? If not, where are they? Who will find them (and what will they think if they do)? Do you want some answers?

Tunnelling and pottery/ing

Plans are proposed: a visit to a pottery firm to try out 'instant ethnography'. Post-qualitative orientations provided provocations to activate thinking in movement (Manning, 2013). This was intensified during the field trip when corporeal and more-than-human connections and entanglements produced changes in movement and affect (Massumi, 2002). ~~Alaimo (2008) and Deleuze's (1994) respective concepts of trans-corporeality and duration were plugged into the field trip experience.~~

Aerating disturbances and bottle kilns

Write an abstract
submit it
wait for the approval
book flight and hotels
write a paper
pack your luggage
prepare slide colour presentations
think about possible questions and answers
check the presentation until last minute and do not listen to other participants' presentations…
(re)presentation
relax and have a beer/cigarettes/wine/zero coke
eat

The bottle kilns (Figure 2) were a huge feature of the local landscape of the industrial North of England. Even though this history has faded the modern landscape is still influenced by the revived working pottery, the housing stock surrounding the pottery, and the heaps of waste from the pottery (now covered in grass) which form the hills around the city.

sleep well

think strategically where to

submit the paper

start to write

go home

kiss a partner

have sex with her/him

Write an abstract

submit it

wait for the approval   *Figure 2: The bottle kiln (upright and inverted) and duration*

book flight and hotels   *diagram*

Aerating dummies/pacifiers

A set of two pacifiers was hung in the dining hall entrance doorway with a long string. Who cares? Pacifiers melted together, only some rings and hard plastic parts remained. Some conference participants listened and did not say anything. Others touched the objects, hung the pacifiers, and photographed the departing things. Conference participants were concerned about not disturbing the spatial arrangement, conference protocol and discourses, disturbing others and themselves. Things cannot become too complicated or noticeable since we, them, all, can get lost. Caution, pacifiers in the confined space! Watch out! …..........What do pacifiers produce? How do they intra-act with all the phenomena in the spacetimemattering? Do they produce affects; movements of? They did produce something. It was possible to sense movements around the pacifiers; arms moving, mouths moving, bodies moving; bumping into the pacifiers, walking around them again and again and again, as diffractions. The pacifiers' movement

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answers

check the presentation until last

minute and do not listen to other

participants' presentations…

(re)presentation

relax and have a

beer/cigarettes/wine/zero coke

eat

sleep well

think strategically where to submit

11

produced movements/intra-actions/cuts in/through/around	the paper
the human and non-human phenomena in the	start to write
spacetimemattering.	go home
	kiss a partner
	have sex with her/him

Re-turning posthumanism and material feminism

Matter and objects have the capacity for trouble as scholars in organisation studies have begun to recognise (Carlile et al., 2013). In posthumanism, sociomaterial and new material feminisms, objects play a central and fundamental role in overcoming the bifurcated ontology that separates humans from non-humans. These approaches presume a 'relational ontology', an 'entanglement' of the social and the material (Barad, 2007; Cecez-Kecanovic, 2014; Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Pels, Hetherington and Vandenberghe, 2002), in which humans and non-humans are performed and continuously brought into being through relations with each other. Human beings and artefacts do not exist as separated and self-contained entities: they are composite and shifting assemblages. Bennett (2010, p. viii) speaks of 'vital matter', of agency as 'distributed', and of 'the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and design of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own'. The notion of entanglement thus challenges the enduring dichotomies between self/other, material/semiotic, nature/culture, agency/structure, knowledge/power, active/passive, human/non-human, reason/emotion, and truth/falsehood.

Aerating data-bags

Write an abstract	*[Data within (data]-bag) diffracted*
submit it	
wait for the approval	Phenomena at the stream *Post-qualitative methodology of*
book flight and hotels	*difference* are invited to intra-act with a book chapter: *[Data*
write a paper	*within (data]-bag) diffracted* (Author2). The Terrace (the
pack your luggage	venue for our presentation) becomes an open space where
prepare slide colour presentations	some copies of the book chapter are spread on the floor of the
think about possible questions	room; on the wall are hanging some pictures of bags. On the

and answers

check the presentation until last minute and do not listen to other participants' presentations…

(re)presentation

relax and have a beer/cigarettes/wine/zero coke

eat

sleep well

think strategically where to submit the paper

start to write

go home

kiss a partner

have sex with her/him

Write an abstract

submit it

wait for the approval

book flight and hotels

write a paper

presentation table a PC connected to internet is showing *Émily Muller*, a short film which lasts less than 20 minutes and includes in-data-bag improvisations (and we invite the readers to watch it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGAPpSjRehU). In the Terrace room the book by Sophie Calle art-work *L'Hôtel* circulates between participants. Here she describes a period of three weeks that she spent in a Venetian hotel as a chambermaid. Sophie took photos of the rooms, inspected personal belongings, opened drawers and closets, used makeup from beauty cases, rummaged suitcases, sprayed herself with fragrance, saved a pair of shoes left in the bin, read letters, and so on. Some stream participants intra-act with a personal little bag.

Going through the content of somebody's purse during an exercise related to 'bag-data-bag'. Pulling out a wallet and a driving license. Is somebody wearing dotted red rubber boots? What will rubber boots with holes in them do? Born December 21st 1970. The citizens of Great Britain will not have driving licenses like these much longer due to the UK's departure from EU. Uncertainty about entering into a purse. Guilt and many other feelings about peeking into somebody's private objects and content of a personal space. Can you, dare you, should you? Private objects inside the purse bring back memories and also some painful events from the past. Are we allowed to investigate otherness in them and us through the objects? Where has this person been shopping?? --- oohh one sees --- in the liqueur store. Maybe also a pint of beer in a pub in Manchester. Birthday gifts, or party masks---what are these purchases?

Somebody sees two driving licenses. Why two? This cannot be you. Oh my god. Many women have very horrible driving license pictures. But this one is not horrible. Smelling red berries in a lip balm. It smells so good [sky full of stars] and

colour is also very beautiful. Headphones, internet access pass, a pen. Still no tampon. Can one look deeper? Can you dig deeper? Take all objects out. This is too personal. Tiny things are so easily (and intentionally) missed. Going to the mama's purse to get money for some candy. This investigation is too personal and the objects are too revealing. Still no tampon. Why is the tampon left in the bag? Who dares to touch a tampon? Gorilla dares you!

After 20 minutes: silence in the room - no comments, no questions, no answers.

Aerating earthworms

The field trip to pottery (and the many other experimental, object-orientated happenings) served as a reminder to the multiple and vital nature of inquiry (Author4) – a way to question and challenge traditional research practices and push them to new limits. These practices – or rather practicings (there is more comfort in the uncertainty of the gerund, the becoming!) – of research felt like effecting 'infra-empiricisms' (Clough cited in MacLure, 2011, p. 999); effecting 'sensations, forces, and movements beneath the skin, in matter, in cells, and in the gut' (*ibid*) in the movement and flow of their post-qualitative experiments. However, these very same practicings – and the objects that vitalised them – resist capture by those interpretive schema most often applied in the name of rigour, of normative research practices.

These happenings continue to lurk, leaking and irrupting into and through our ongoing collaborations; their unruly joys reverberate in chatteringly silent ruminations that precede and are consequent to their own occurrence, are (mis)aligned in the presence of smiled-at pasts, and (re)materialise in the embodied joys of still-to-do becomings in this on-going post-qualitative collaborative project. These happenings refuse to let (us) go. They haunt our attempts at excavation, at removal. They move, and remain as agitators for and of research practice that troubles rather than tells.

Aerating notes from the Field I

The steam engine is the heart of the factory – the factory being built around it. *Write*. The nearby canal is the arteries bringing the life blood to feed the pottery-machine. *Submit.* The raw materials – earth (clay) and water (steam) enter the gaping mouth of the factory. *Wait and book.* Here humans becoming-with the factory are part of the production line where the (de)(re)composition of earth → clay → ware (pottery) → earth becomes the products of the labouring beast. *Pack, prepare think.* The human bodies leaking electrons at the molecular level enters a zone of indiscernibility with the clay particulate with which they work – their bodies fused with the machine – a human-factory hybrid. *Check, check, check.* Humans are the cogs in the wheel, an intrinsic yet expendable part of the pottery production. *Eat, drink, relax and enjoy.* The steam engine heart beats – whoosh, click, click, click; kilns fire and the ware is produced. Smoke chokes the local city like the exhalation of giant lungs as 10 tonnes of coal are used for each batch of firing in the kiln. *Sleep, drink and drink and drink, and smoke and smoke.* The pottery-machine territorializes the unruly clay/human couplet to produce pottery for fine dining – order from chaos – and the pottery-machine keeps moving… *Have sex .... somewhere.*

Aerating penis straws

Write an abstract submit it wait for the approval book flight and hotels write a paper pack your luggage	Two volunteers generate a penis straw installation using existing colourful glass bowl inside the women's bathroom during a conference on gender, work, and organisation. Once the installation was there the ambiance of the bathroom space changes. Gender in the bathroom becomes more visible and touchable. What could be more (in)appropriate? (Penis-

prepare slide colour presentations

think about possible questions and answers

check the presentation until last minute and do not listen to other participants' presentations…

(re)presentation

relax and have a beer/cigarettes/wine/zero coke

eat

sleep well

think strategically where to submit the paper

start to write

go home

kiss a partner

have sex with her/him

Write an abstract

submit it

write a paper

answers

shaped) Straws in the (bath)Room. More specifically the bowls of dry flowers were filled with additional decoration including 12 pink, blue, red, and yellow plastic penis straws. Some straws stood up proudly where ever they had been placed whereas others fell down to be offered to the bathroom users as an odd invitation or strange business card. Next to the straws was a note with an email address. The note asked bathroom users to document their thoughts, feelings and email them to the given address. No emails arrived.

How might plastic, quite poorly made and ill-shaped penis straws create non-comfortability or curiosity? [I can see you now!] How and what did these strange objects in a familiar space produce? Sounds, silences, laughter, slowness, rapidness, ignorance, curiosity, talk, discourse, amazement, surprise, rumours, odd flavours, weird connections, unanticipated relations and so on. Recorded bathroom silence became memory space for nothing and everything. Seemingly silent sounds of the bathroom lingered while wiping, sweeping, waiting, playing, searching and so on. Something strange was happening. Sounds of washing hands and flushing toilets continued to overpower the soundscape and control the flow of the women waiting in the line. Nobody paid attention to the straws as if they were invisible. A few hours later only few straws were left. Where have the others gone? Are straws producing now in hotel rooms, cars, restaurants, pubs, homes, in airplanes? How did the straws get out of the bathroom? How might they be used later?

Tunnelling cyborg writing, or the struggle against perfect scholarly communication

We noted earlier that the cyborg is irredeemably and positively hybrid, and gives rise to writing in its image i.e., writing which is a mixture, a mash-up; writing which troubles boundaries, which misbehaves; writing which disturbs and perhaps annoys the reader at times. In producing

'academic' writing (such as this) which (deliberately) misbehaves we are enacting a distinct post-qualitative research aim: to do cyborg writing as an earthworm experiment in order to produce something that differs from academic-writing-as-usual. In this latter mode, academic writing is normalised as a guarantor of Truth, Insight and Knowledge; it rests on presumptions of Order, Logic and Transparency; and it hides the grubby secrets that attend all 'real-world' research behind a smoothly scrubbed, pristine surface that would put the cleanest bathroom to shame. We have, of course, tidied our surfaces somewhat and, as 'academic scrubbers', we have engaged in the 'serious fun' that attends 'vigorous … editing, an extension of thinking and … re-scribing' (Badley, 2011, p. 262). This has been done not to hide but to enact and foreground our cyborg writing practices as a mode of 'pollution' which undercuts presumptions of 'perfect communication' (Haraway, 1991, p. 552). For example, Lather and Smithies' (1997) polyphonic text *Troubling the Angels* and, more recently, the collaborative biography work of Davies and Gannon (2012), and Author3 feminist bricolage, all make deliberate efforts to pollute and 'mess up' standard codes of layout and text. More broadly, variants of textual 'messing with a purpose' has also been undertaken by post-qualitative researchers (Author1; Author5), by radical philosophers (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and by new material feminists (Barad, 2010). One other noteworthy formal experiment is Bennington and Derrida's (1993) book which comprises two texts – *Derridabase* (by Bennington) and *Circumfession* (by Derrida) written respectively above and below a line third-way down the page and composed as 'fifty-nine periods and periphrases written in a sort of internal margin' (un-numbered page).

In organisation studies, Gibson Burrell's attempts in *Pandemonium* (1997) to 'write against the text in reversal of its trajectory' (Höpfl, 2000, p. 104) is an obvious example of 'textual pollution'. More recent instances are seen in Höpfl's (2007) recusant fragmentary articulations against the control and silencing effected towards woman in relation to work, in Sayers and Jones' (2015) poetic representational strategies for inscribing the vital bloodiness of menstruation into the organisation, and in Rippin's (2009; 2011) writing that adopts arts-based representational strategies to disrupt the normativity of phallocentric writing practices that dominate mainstream organisational studies. Sayers and Jones' (2015) paper – part of the special issue of GWO on writing the feminine in organisation studies (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015) – contributes to those on-going efforts to challenge 'the limits to what organisational researchers are allowed to write and how they are allowed to write it' (Biehl-Missal, 2015, p. 185). However, and despite numerous invocations to adopt disruptive writing practices as a means to question 'persistent forms of (masculine) academic presentation and structures of gendered organisation studies writing that limit what organisational researchers are allowed to produce and that restrict what 'readers' are allowed to understand' (*ibid*, p. 180),

examples remain relatively rare – a rarity that may reflect the technological constraints imposed on writing differently, disruptively, in academic forms and formats (Muhr and Rehn, 2015). According to Prasad (2016) cyborg writing is fraught with anxieties (both for readers and writers) and often encounters obstacles, notably in the form of reviewers and editors of high-ranking journals acting as custodians of 'academic-writing-as-usual' whereas for Muhr and Rehn (2015) (also in this journal) cyborg writing is about a desire for greater textual freedom.

Turning writescapes

Write an abstract

submit it

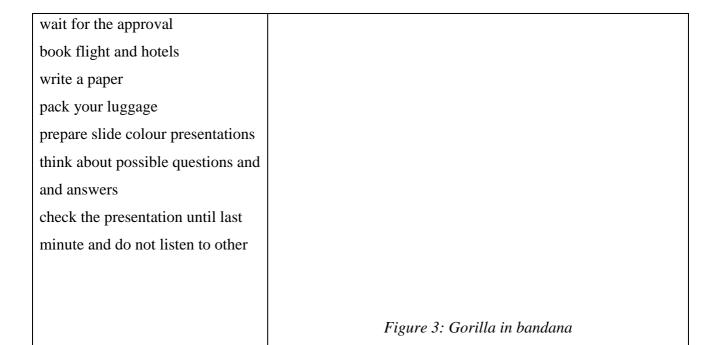*Writescapes (of spatial differences)*

Phenomena are invited to write in difference spaces, wherever they like within the conference building for 20 minutes. Wandering around the conferences spaces and ending in the men bathroom. Writing differently is not so comfortable. Writing while standing up in a small room with a pen and a sheet of paper is not so easy. Feeling like a spy or like Laud Humphreys who described impersonal sex encounters between men in public bathrooms. What kind of interesting encounters can happen while writing (auto)ethnographic notes in a small bathroom room? Noises: lock, zipper, pee and something else, personal relief, toilet paper, zipper, unlock the door, (4.27 seconds); open the water, takes some soap (it is run out)…
How the noises in a women's toilet might be different? Opening the little window and seeing the courtyard. Another phenomenon enters the toilet: two phenomena look at each other. Silence for a few seconds. One phenomenon: 'Are you ok?'. The other phenomenon: 'This is experimental writing'. Phenomenon: 'Ah, ok' and it escapes in the bathroom. The door is superlocked. Again: zipper, pee, personal relief, toilet paper, zipper. Door unlocked and it runs away without washing its hands (2.05 seconds – very fast) and saying goodbye.

What is phenomenon searching or looking for here? How does this space constitute you as researcher and spy, and lurker, and suspicious, and something else?

Is a toilet precisely a good place to 'investigate'?

Turning disturbances with gorillas

Write an abstract

submit it

wait for the approval

book flight and hotels

write a paper

pack your luggage

prepare slide colour presentations

think about possible questions and answers

check the presentation until last minute and do not listen to other participants' presentations…

(re)presentation

relax and have a beer/cigarettes/wine/zero coke

eat

sleep well

think strategically where to submit the paper

start to write

go home

kiss a partner

have sex with her/him

Write an abstract

submit it

Black plastic gorilla started his/her/their journey from the table on the upper lobby of the conference building. A paper was attached to the black gorilla which said: "I am a travelling object. I would like to see a different place every ten minutes. Please document where I have been, what I felt and saw. On Thursday July 30th I would like be in the Terrace Room at 15.30." Gorilla travelled and visited various places.

10.30 Keele Hall Gallery. I liked that suite.

12.00 I'm in a corridor alone … I feel a bit sad, on the 2nd floor, so I'm going to move to a new place, I want to see some presentations!! So I stay now in Harriet's room to see what's going on!

1.30 On the floor in the corridor

3.00 I came down in the lift and admired the view. Went to the toilet but I had to be blindfolded before I went in 'cos it was the ladies' toilet.

Gorilla was successfully returned to the Terrace Room on time. However, gorilla had been dressed. When she was returned, gorilla wore a pink bandana tied with a bow to the back of her head. The bandana was placed to cover her eyes. Was gorilla gendered during his/her/their journey to become a woman since her last visit had been to the women's bathroom?

Can the bathroom produce gender? Can the movements of smells of perfume, the sound of heels, the movements in and around big mirror, produce gender?

wait for the approval book flight and hotels write a paper pack your luggage prepare slide colour presentations think about possible questions and and answers check the presentation until last minute and do not listen to other	*Figure 3: Gorilla in bandana*

Aerating objects as trouble makers

Like the cyborg, objects confound boundaries; objects have agency and a capacity for trouble. When objects entered the neoliberal GWO conference space (at the entrance, in the corridors, in some rooms and in the bathrooms) they became *agitators* both as agents with the power to disturb the status quo and as encroachers able to stir up (wanted and/or unwanted) emotions and feelings. Objects as agitators distracted/removed participants from the disciplined serious (more significant?) activities designed for an adult academic audience. They incited 'misbehaviour' such as theft and provoked 'age-inappropriate' conduct such as play and fun. Agitation comes from an effervescing sense of 'this feels interesting', not an anxiety to nail and know and show. Objects both interfered and dialogued with the neoliberal space of the GWO Conference in a way that we do not know (and cannot know) and influenced the participants' experiences in unforeseen and unreckoned ways.

The objects brought to the conference could have been understood as 'out of place' and then been disciplined or removed. However, they were not subjected to control or removal like those 'dangerous things' that are confiscated by airport security body check points. Perhaps they were not perceived as dangerous or threatening but as inconsequential or trivial, even. The GWO objects did not, in that regulated space, have any immediate use-value. It was, however, the objects' *misuse-*value (Brown, 1998 in MacLure, MacRae and Allmer 2010) which allowed us-and-them to enter into a magical, unpredictable and not yet thought (dreamlike) world. Their unnecessariness, in the neoliberal contained conference space allied with theirs-and-our sensory perception (touch, smell, earing, taste), defer to their capacity to disorientate the human subject, and allow objects-with-us to

enter in a fantastic, imaginary, dreamlike world which is also a way of knowing and thinking (and learning). Objects became-with-us as earthworms to re-turn the neoliberal conference into a different sort of space – a space of coalition, of composting and composing.

Aerating notes from the Field II

W	My finger hesitates above the phrase 'Notes from the field'.
S	Whose notes? Which field? And – what are these notes doing?
W	Not what are they doing 'here' or what do they 'mean' but
B	what is their force, their agency? 'Field notes' too are objects-
W	as-actants. These notes laid out on the page hail me – they
P	draw me into their orbit. I feel-sense-hear the pulsing of
P	machines and mangling of bodies, I am (momentarily) in the
C	factory, noting the harsh and unrelenting modes of capitalist
R	production that (nevertheless) produce objects of aesthetic
E	beauty. These field notes are not a transparent window onto
S	what whoever was writing them was thinking-feeling as they
T	(he? she?) stood in the museum that day. Their Deleuzian
S	inflections, their intensities, enfold me, wrap me into them.
G	Manning (2013, p. 164) draws on Whitehead's process
K	philosophy to propose that 'a field for experience … does not
	begin and end with the human subject. There is no subject 'of'
	experience, no consciousness outside of the event in its
	unfolding. What matters are the actualizations of movement,
	and how 'I'/ 'we' are in-folded into movement. These
	fieldnotes are moving me, they are co-composing 'me' as 'I'
	read them (just as they are co-composing 'you' reading this
	now), producing a momentary individuation from the flux.
	Which has already gone.

Aerating histories, times, bodies, orientations, and affects

The juxtaposition of the decomposition and the new products on offer in the pottery shop produces an affective response in visitors which reflects the past/present. May (2005) explores how Deleuze engages with Bergson's concept of duration. Here the past (virtual) and the present (actual) are not two successive moments in time but are two elements that co-exist and are in relations with each other. The past becomes relational as it does not cease to exist but is the conduit through which each present moment passes. The duration diagram in Figure 2 details how the different strata are acting in expansion and contraction, however, this diagram is not relational to linear time (Deleuze, 1994). The 'totality of the past' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 60) is in each section/level (A-B) and a more contracted past is one where the elements of the entire past are brought closer to a particular person's engagement with the world (S) (May, 2005). During the visit to the potteries past and the present intermingle as they (un)(re)fold where the human-factory hybrid resonates and becomes expressed. As visitors explore the factory the (de)composition reveals the historical entanglement, from the soot on the floor to the collection of pottery moulds. A visit to the steam engine, now restored, and the beating heart can be felt. Entering the kiln the affective flows produce a sensation, the weight of history pressing down on modern bodies. Touching the kiln floor it seems easy to connect with the humans of the past – porous bodies connecting through a spatio-temporal assemblage and a type of co-habitation.

Ahmed (2010) notes that orientation is experienced in a co-habitation of space, and that when bodies perform repetitions they take the shape of these repetitions in ways which 'orients the body in some ways rather than others' (*ibid*, p. 247). As illustration: the pottery-factory-body orients bodies within the pottery-machine enabling the flow of affect (in)(on)(through) the borders of human/more-than-human relations of the industrial past of the site and the present day. Also as illustration: the people-phenomena on the bench at ICQI were inspired by a somewhat propitious affective atmosphere which momentarily concretised in inspiring them to pursue experimental spatial disturbances at GWO. These occasioned momentary connections with other bodies, and flowed into and through the affective encounters which attended the writing of this paper. Such affective atmospheres are another mode of trans-ing, as transpersonal forces of affect circulate amongst bodies, enmeshing the material, psychical, experiential and atmospheric. Anderson (2009, p. 79) speaks of affective atmospheres as indeterminate 'spaces of intensity' which envelop and exceed individual bodies. A third illustration: the 'we' constituted by the GWO are diffused and dispersed. We return to different universities, various parts of the world, and other locations, orienting our bodies to daily working rhythms. We reconnect on Skype, we continue to produce post-GWO disturbances (a Billy doll travels to a home desk; Gorilla takes up residence on a shelf; pacifiers seek to be touched again), we write in virtual spaces. Atmospheric presences and absences

surge between us to assemble situations of encounter in which something happens and something gets done, then falls away and disperses, an intensity fading like the evening light. Atmospheres are not bound to human bodies; they assemble, envelop and exceed them, bringing into vital relation the nonhuman and other-than-human with which we (humans) share our everyday lives.

Tunnelling decomposition

Write the approval

book a paper

think other participants'

presentations…

relax

sleep

think

start

go

have sex

think about possible questions and answers

The tour of the factory showed that certain people who worked in the production process were less important that the ware that was produced. This opens the ethical and political dimensions of the pottery-machine being more important than the employees who work the space. The human and more-than-human bodies in the space enacting a repetition of practice (Ahmed, 2010) that is never-ending with the factory open 24 hours per day.

Here bodies do something to the local population both in the historic and contemporary landscape that is apparent in the present day. The affect in the pottery-machine can be felt/experienced when visiting the pottery complex where images of decomposition surround visitors as they experience the past/present affect in/through the space (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Decomposition in the pottery

Aerating displaced objects and Minor gestures

Displaced/misused/misplaced strange objects can be seen as a minor gesture (Manning, 2016) formed in relation to the major (for example, object, space, discourse of the conference). For Manning (2016), Minor gestures produce variation in the normative organisation. Minor gestures' rhythms are not governed by the norm or pre-existing structures but they are in flux and continuously changing. Minor gestures are not known in advance but they are produced in-act and *in situ*. They are activators, carriers, and allies of language in making and in action. Manning proposes that Minor gestures invent their own value and do not claim a space but produce a 'space-of-variation' (*ibid*, p. 2). The Minor gesture becomes a means to disrupt traditional normative research practices, for example, methodology, methods, data, as the 'Minor gestures recast the field, open it to contrast, make felt its differential. They do so by activating, in the event, a change in direction, a change in quality' (*ibid*, p. 23). This paper reveals a number of our experiments as Minor gestures as moments of an event – the data-bag, matter out of place (dummies/pacifiers), the penis straws and the field trip are all activators which allow us to think-in-the-act where the 'Minor gesture is what *activates* the work under precise conditions, what makes the attunements of an emerging ecology felt, what makes the work work' (*ibid*, p. 65).

Turning and re-turning the AcademicConferenceMachine: (in)conclusions

The interventions ~~set forth~~ set out in this article disturb the routines, regularities, and striated spaces of the AcademicConferenceMachine at the GWO 2016 annual conference. These interventions deploy post-qualitative writing modes to disturb normalised academic research and writing practices in which research is 'done', 'data' are 'obtained', and then 'reported', and written 'up'. These interventions and disruptions – both at the conference and in this article – orient themselves towards setting events in motion, making suggestions that may resonate, and developing ideas that might proliferate.

These experiments/experiences have been a relay to a wider research creation event, which is still ongoing, as we-as-earthworms turn and return to the GWO experiments. They form diffractive patterns in which light and sound waves co-exist in each other's presence and 'overlap in a common spatial region' (Barad, 2007, p. 417). Experimentation did not create a liminal or 'separate' space on the edge of the conference; the experimental doings were layered into the conference space, disturbances tangled into its routines and regularities. Nonhuman and human things, objects, bodies, spaces, stuff, inseparable and enmeshed. Figurations of human and plastic, flesh and fur, paper and powerpoint. Just as earthworms perform vital activities of turning the soil to aerate and fertilize it with their organic, mineral-rich castings, our research experiments turn the conference space around

and about in ways which open it up to multiplicities, while this article is suggestive of other ways of doing, knowing and being in research practices. Earthworm experiments produce tunnels of differentiation and coalition which deploy post-qualitative research. Cyborg writing practices have been put to work to reveal events in which serious play and sheer fun rub each other up. Earthworm experiments are oriented to turning and re-turning, to 'staying with the trouble' in order to explore ways of 'articulating … assemblages through situated work and play in the muddle of messy living' (Haraway, 2016, p. 42).

Haraway (2016) suggests that earthworm practices turn 'us' humans into 'humus' because 'human as humus has potential … to chop and shred Homo' and help us refuse the man-made catastrophe that the Anthropocene portends. She invites us to 'Imagine a conference not on the Future of the Humanities in the Capitalist Restructuring University, but instead on the Power of the Humusities for a Habitable Multispecies Muddle' (*ibid*, p. 32). How would this change our conference-ings, our research practice-ings and our writing becomings?

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no relevant affiliations or conflicts to declare.

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